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No. 56

OCT. 4, 1913

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# Nick Carter Stories



BACK FROM THE DEAD  
or The Disappearance  
\* \* \* of Princess Zora

STREET & SMITH PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



# NICK CARTER STORIES

Issued Weekly. Entered as Second-class Matter at the New York Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., New York.  
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No. 56.

NEW YORK, October 4, 1913.

Price Five Cents.

## BACK FROM THE DEAD; Or, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PRINCESS ZORA.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

#### BACK FROM THE DEAD.

Nick Carter studied the card that he held in his hand with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"What sort of a looking person is that Franz Dannenhauer, Joseph?" he asked finally of the servant who stood respectfully waiting at his elbow.

"He is a large man, sir, about thirty or thirty-five years old, I should say. He——"

"With blond hair, brushed back from his forehead, à la pompadour?"

"Yes, sir; the same, sir."

"Then I should say that the dead had come to life, Joseph."

"Yes, sir. Just as you say, sir."

"And what do you say, Chick?" asked the detective, turning to his assistant, who had just entered the study.

"About what, Nick?" asked Chick, throwing himself into a morris chair.

"About that."

The detective flipped the card he had been nervously fingering across the table to his assistant.

Chick's eyebrows raised as he read the card, and then he looked up at his chief.

"What is this, Nick—a joke?" he asked.

"No, there is a gentleman downstairs in the reception room who has just sent this card to me."

"Inasmuch as I have just returned from seeing that Mr. Franz Dannenhauer, or, rather, his mortal remains, were carefully placed under the sod, at your expense, and in deference to the feelings of your friend, the Princess Zora, I should say, at an offhand guess, that the gentleman in the reception room was a gold-brick artist, or a con man."

"How about the man you have just been putting under the sod?"

"He's too dead to speak for himself, unless you want me to believe in the materialization of spirits."

"You may show the gentleman up, Joseph," said Nick, after a moment's pause. "I will see him here."

"What do you make of it, Nick?" asked Chick, as the imperturbable Joseph left the room.

"What can I make of it, Chick, until I see the man?" replied the detective, with a characteristic shrug of his shoulders.

A few minutes later Joseph announced "Mr. Franz Dannenhauer," and silently withdrew from the room.

A tall, heavily built man stood within the doorway. His handsome face was clean-shaven, and wore an expression of anxiety. His hair was light, and brushed straight back from his forehead. As he looked questioningly from one man to the other, Chick sprang to his feet, scarcely suppressing the cry of amazement that leaped to his lips, while Nick, more of a master of his emotions, moved a little bit up in his chair, while his hands tightened on the arms.

"Mr. Nicholas Carter?" asked the newcomer, still looking from one to the other.

"I am Nick Carter," replied the detective quietly. "Please be seated Mr.—er—I have misplaced your card."

"Dannenhauer—Franz Dannenhauer," replied the visitor, taking a seat a few feet from Nick, and looking him in the eye with a clear, honest gaze.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Dannenhauer. What can I do for you, Mr. Dannenhauer?"

"Find my wife, sir," replied the man quickly, leaning forward in his chair anxiously. "I am told that you are a great detective."

Nick lifted his hand deprecatingly.

"Your wife is lost—missing?"



"Yes, lost—missing. I do not know what to call it. At the Hotel Cordelia they tell me that she has gone, but they will tell me little. They regard me with suspicion when I tell them my name and who I am. Why? And then they tell me to come to you. I am here."

In his obvious excitement the man spoke with a slight foreign accent.

Notwithstanding his skepticism, Nick Carter, an adept in the reading of men, was strangely impressed with the evident honesty and anxiety of his caller, and it puzzled him much.

The detective had but just closed up a case into which this man seemingly intruded himself. A man who had registered at the Mammoth as Franz Dannenhauer had been mysteriously murdered, and his body as mysteriously spirited away. Nick Carter had accidentally discovered the body of the slain man floating in the Sound, and by his peculiar methods of deduction had fixed the crime on one Prince Thamen and the Princess Tanza, natives of a mysterious country lying back of Yucatan.\*

And yet, here sat a man in front of him, gazing honestly into his eyes, who claimed to be Franz Dannenhauer! And, so far as face and form went, he might indeed be he!

For a moment Nick thought deeply. Somehow this man seemed to him to be sincere, and Nick Carter was seldom at fault in reading men.

"Mr. Dannenhauer," said the detective quietly, "when did you see your wife last?"

"Ah, many days ago—on the other side—across the ocean!"

"I see. You came here first, and your wife was to join you?"

"No, no, Mr. Carter. The other way, please. My wife came first. I was to follow on the next steamer."

"And now, Mr. Dannenhauer, if you want me to help you, don't you think you had better tell me a little more of your story?"

"Ah, Mr. Carter, there is nothing more to tell, except that I was to meet my wife at the Cordelia, and when I get there she is not there, and they tell me to see you. That is all."

"No, Mr. Dannenhauer, that is not all. If I were to tell you that you were dead, would that be sufficient? Wouldn't you wish to know something of the cause?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Carter—but, then, what foolishness! I am not dead, and if I were dead I could not ask you foolish questions!"

The man's eyes were snapping now with a feeling very near to anger.

"And I tell you that Franz Dannenhauer is dead," continued Nick quietly; "and that you are asking foolish questions when you want me to tell you what has become of your wife without telling me anything of the occurrence that led up to her disappearance. Let me assure you, sir, that my assistant, here, has just returned from burying Franz Dannenhauer!"

Nick Carter's visitor leaped from his chair in great excitement.

"Bah!" he cried, waving his muscular arms in the air. "Why did they send me to a crazy man?"

"Sit down, sir!" said Nick quietly, but somewhat

sternly, "and tell me—if you do not consider it a foolish question—why you did not take the next steamer, as you agreed with your wife to do?"

The man ceased his excited pacing of the floor, and looked at Nick in amazement.

"How do you know that I did not come on the next steamer?" he demanded.

"Because I infer that you would have acted at once, as soon as you failed to find your wife. I should say that you arrived this morning."

The man nodded his head emphatically.

"I did," he said quickly.

"And, as Mrs. Dannenhauer arrived more than a week ago, it is obvious that you did not come by the next steamer."

"How do you know when my wife arrived?" cried the man, his excitement returning.

"You have not taken me sufficiently into your confidence for me to know that I am speaking of your wife. The lady to whom I refer is Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer, and she—"

"Yes, yes; and do I not tell you that I am Franz Dannenhauer, and that the lady is my wife?"

"And I tell you that Franz Dannenhauer is dead and buried—murdered!"

"My God! Franz dead—murdered! I would not have wished that fate for him, greatly as he has wronged me!"

"Don't you think it would be just as well to sit down now and tell me all?" asked Nick quietly.

The man sank back into a chair, and dropped his head into his hands. When he raised it, after a moment, his face was pale but determined.

"First, sir, tell me of my wife—Mrs. Dannenhauer," he appealed. "She is well?"

"As well as a young widow who has suffered such a recent bereavement can be expected to be."

There was a smile in Nick's eyes that did not comport with his words, but the man did not notice it.

"She is not a widow! I tell you that I am Franz Dannenhauer—her husband—alive—well!"

"At least, Mrs. Dannenhauer believes herself to be a widow, sir."

"God! She thinks that I am dead?"

"She thinks that her husband is dead, yes."

"But—"

"Come, sir," said Nick sternly; "it is useless to play at cross-purposes with me. It will be better for you to tell me all of your story."

For a moment the man hesitated, and then he said:

"As you say, it may be better so. You evidently have some knowledge of my affairs—how or what I know not."

Nick nodded.

"Believe me," he said, "my interest is entirely in behalf of Mrs. Dannenhauer, with whom I sympathize deeply, and it is because I would not cause her unnecessary pain or annoyance that I insist that you shall state your case before I go further into the matter with you. You come to me and ask me to find your wife. You say your wife is Mrs. Dannenhauer. A Mrs. Dannenhauer, who believes herself to be a widow, is already a client of mine. I cannot jeopardize her interests for yours—blindly. Now, if you care for any service that I may be able to render you, I will listen to your story—the whole of it, if you please, sir."

\*See NICK CARTER STORIES No. 55: "The Golden-hair Clew; or, Nick Carter's Mystic Puzzle."



## CHAPTER II.

## A STRANGE STORY.

As the detective finished speaking, he sat quietly back in his chair, and waited for his visitor to proceed, if he wished to do so.

The man had evidently made up his mind to state his case, and he began at once:

"In the first place, sir, there are, or were, two Franz Dannenhauers. The one you say is dead—murdered—is my cousin. The woman you say believes herself to be his widow—though Heaven knows why—is my wife. I will make my story as short as possible. I met Zora—my wife—abroad, only a few months ago. We were strongly attracted to each other from our first meeting. What I shall tell you now, sir, will sound very much like a fairy tale: Zora is a native of a strange, little-known country in South America. It is forbidden by their gods that these people shall ever leave their own country, with the exception of the members of the royal family. These, after they attain a certain age, are sent into the outside world to acquire knowledge and a fitting education. But they must return and live their lives out in the country of their gods and their fathers.

"Zora, my wife, was a princess of the royal house. She was the last of her race to leave her country for an education abroad. She was also the first to rebel against the customs of her fathers. She soon came to abhor the circumscribed life of her people, and when we met, and I told her of my love for her, she admitted that she did not wish to return, but feared her people. I assured her that under the protection of my name she would be safe, and we were married. A certain prince of her own country, who, it seemed, had more liberty than the rest of his people, had been deputed to meet her in New York, and return with her to her country. She wished to meet him, and tell him of her marriage and her determination never to return to her own country. I could see no objection to this, and so she sailed. I was detained in connection with my financial affairs at home, and was to follow her on the next steamer. Would that the good God had let me come with her!"

"Take heart, my friend. I can assure you that no harm has come to Mrs. Dannenhauer," said Nick earnestly. "Go on with your story. Where does this cousin come into it?"

"Right here, sir. It is not necessary to go into family history that is not of the pleasantest sort. Let it suffice to say that my father and my uncle had become estranged after the birth of my cousin, because of some difficulty in the settlement of the estate of their father, as frequently happens on the other side of the water, where younger sons are made to suffer because nature sees fit to send one into the world before the other. My father, being the elder, had inherited the estates of my grandfather, while his brother had been provided for with an annuity only. Although the family quarrel that resulted was handed down, after the death of my father and my uncle, to myself and my cousin, I did not share in the bitter feeling as strongly as the latter. This, perhaps, was natural, inasmuch as he was the sufferer, not I; but I honestly believe that that fact had nothing to do with my feelings, for I always sympathized sincerely with my cousin. At all events, as soon as I married, I determined to make a further financial provision for my cousin

from my father's estate, and it was this business that detained me after my wife had sailed for this country.

"Outwardly, my cousin had never shown any ill will toward me, and expressed what was apparently honest appreciation of what I proposed doing for him. He was, also, seemingly, very fond of the woman I was to make my wife, and was present at the ceremony. We had, in fact, become so apparently reconciled that he invited me to a farewell dinner at his apartments on the night before I was to sail. The rest is soon told. In some way my wine or my food was drugged, for I lost consciousness during the dinner, and when I recovered I was lying in my cousin's bed, and my cousin's servant was anxiously trying to arouse me by knocking on the door. When I admitted him he went stolidly about my toilet preparations, while I lay silently in bed trying to collect my senses, for I was at first so dazed by the effect of the drug that I could not at once comprehend my position.

"Finally the events of the night began to return to me, and I began to arrange them in order in my mind, when suddenly I realized that the man had no suspicion that I was not his master. The clothing that he was laying out for me was that of my cousin. Mine was nowhere in sight. I retained presence of mind enough not to betray myself to the servant.

"Again I returned to a blurred survey of the night before, and this time, as I arrayed one event after another, I suddenly came to a blank that my mind could not fill. It began at a time when we were chatting over our wine, and I could recall nothing from that moment until I had been aroused by my cousin's servant. What did it all mean? That I had been drugged was certain, for I had drank but little, and my head is hardened to the use of wine.

"I determined to try the servant. I depended on the marked physical resemblance between my cousin and myself to continue the man in his error, and any difference in voice might be easily accounted for by heavy drinking and sleeping.

"I have slept late, William," I said, with a yawn.

"Yes, sir. I heard you tell the other Mr. Dannenhauer that you would say good-by to him at the steamer, and I took the liberty to call you, sir, but could not arouse you until now. The steamer sailed an hour ago. I hope you will not blame me, sir."

"Like a flash a veil was lifted from my mind. Without the slow process of thought or reason, the whole plot became clear to me. My cousin intended to impersonate me. By some chance I had escaped the fatal effects of a drug, from whose influence it had been intended that I should never awake! At first only the humorous side of my cousin's failure appealed to me. But then came the thought of Zora, and the fact that I had missed my steamer!

"I leaped from the bed like a madman, and, paying no attention to the amazement of the servant, hurried into such clothes as came to hand, and left the house without explanation. As I grew cooler, I realized that no great harm had yet been done. I would take the next steamer, and confront my gentle cousin in New York. The rest you know, sir. I hope you are convinced of my integrity, and, if so, in God's name tell me what has become of Zora—of my wife!"

"Yes, Mr. Dannenhauer, I am perfectly satisfied with your story, and you should be thankful that events have



shaped themselves as they have, else my assistant might have buried you instead of your cousin."

For a moment Nick Carter's visitor sat in silence, his head in his hands. Then he said slowly:

"If, as you say, Mr. Carter, you now have confidence in me and my story, you must understand that I am very much, what you call, at sea as to what has happened. Franz, you say, is dead—murdered. How—why?"

"I will be brief, as much that I might tell you is known to you already. A man who had registered at the Hotel Mammoth as Pedro Lopez was found murdered in his room. During a brief interval, while the clerk was notifying the manager, the body was spirited away over the fire escape to the room of a woman who had registered as Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer. From this apartment the body was removed in a trunk. I found it later floating in the Sound, and arrested a man known as Prince Thamen, the Princess Tanza, a sister of Mrs. Dannenhauer, and a creature caller Gaspar, a servant of the prince."

"And they are—"

"Locked up, charged with the murder of Franz Dannenhauer."

"And Zora—the princess—my wife?"

"I have not seen her for two days. She was pretty nearly prostrated by the tragedy—believing, as she did, that you had been murdered—and has not left her room. She was not at the grave, Chick?"

Nick's assistant shook his head in the negative.

Dannenhauer leaped to his feet.

"But why should they have told me that she was not at the hotel?" he cried.

"Your name undoubtedly aroused the suspicions of the clerk. The story of the tragedy has, of course, attracted wide attention."

"I must go to her at once!" cried Dannenhauer.

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and Joseph entered, at Nick's bidding.

"By messenger," he said, handing the detective a note.

"And the messenger?"

"He said there was no answer, sir, but I held him. He is from the Hotel Cordelia."

By this time Nick had opened the envelope and glanced at the inclosure. He looked up suddenly, and said quietly:

"There is no answer, Joseph. You may dismiss the messenger."

Then the detective turned slowly to Dannenhauer, who had caught the words, "Hotel Cordelia," and was looking inquiringly at Nick.

"Sit down, Mr. Dannenhauer," said the detective. "This is of interest to you."

Dannenhauer sank nervously back into his chair. He seemed to feel that the missive contained bad news for him.

Nick read rapidly the few words that the note contained, and then, without a word, handed it to the anxiously waiting man.

This is what Dannenhauer read:

"MY DEAR NICK: Early this morning a note arrived for the princess. Half an hour after it was sent to her room she appeared, dressed for the street, notwithstanding the fact that she has been confined to her apartment for two days, as you know. She seemed to be somewhat agitated, and left a sealed note with me, directed to you. She asked that if she did not return to the hotel within

an hour I should send for you, and give you the letter. The hour has passed, and as the thing seems strange to me, and knowing your deep interest in the case, I hasten to comply with her wishes. I would send the note to you, but, of course, it is possible that she may come back at any moment, so it may be better for you to come here. Sincerely yours,

CHARLES DARRELL, Clerk."

"Gone!" gasped Dannenhauer. "What new devilment is this? Who could have sent the note to her?"

"That we can learn only by going to the Cordelia," replied Nick.

At that moment the telephone at the detective's elbow rang. Nick snapped off the receiver, and clapped it to his ear.

"Yes, this is Nick Carter," he said. "Good morning, inspector."

Then for a moment there was silence while the detective listened. Dannenhauer watched him eagerly, as if he knew that the communication concerned him. The expression of the detective's face, however, did not change until he had hung up the receiver. Then he turned quickly to Dannenhauer.

"Your question as to who could have sent the letter to the princess is answered," he said. "Thamen has escaped!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PRINCESS.

As Nick Carter announced the escape of Thamen, Franz Dannenhauer gazed at him in a sort of stupefaction. He, as well as the detective, associated at once the two events—the disappearance of the Princess Zora and the escape of one of the prisoners.

"What do you make of it?" gasped Dannenhauer finally.

"I fear that it spells trouble" said Nick, "but we can do nothing standing here speculating. Chick, have Danny run round the machine. We will see what that letter to me contains. Come, Dannenhauer, do not lose heart. We will find your bride, and I will land that devil of a prince back in jail. I am in this thing now to stay, even if the trail leads into the mysterious depths of the country of the little brown men."

Fifteen minutes later Nick and Chick, accompanied by Dannenhauer, were speeding up Fifth Avenue just within the speed limit.

"Side street, Danny," said the detective, when they were nearing the Cordelia, and the chauffeur, well trained in the ways of his employer, brought the machine to a stop just around the corner from the main entrance to the hotel.

Telling Chick and Dannenhauer to remain in the car, Nick leaped out before the machine had come to a full stop at the curb, and, hurrying around the corner, entered the hotel by the main entrance in a leisurely manner, and sauntered up to the desk.

"Ah, Darrell," he said to the clerk, who was busy over his books. "Same old grind, eh?"

The clerk looked up quickly, and, recognizing the detective, came forward and held out his hand in greeting. He was familiar with the ways of Nick Carter, and showed no sign that the meeting was not entirely casual.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Carter," he replied cordially. "What brings you up our way? Won't you step around inside the office?"



As he spoke, he stepped to a small door that opened into the private office, and Nick walked quickly in. There were only a few loungers in the main office, and the detective's actions were so casual that he was unnoticed by any of them.

"Now, Darrell," said the detective quickly, his manner changing to one of tense interest as soon as the door had closed behind him. "The letter of the princess, please."

The clerk took an envelope from his pocket, and handed it to Nick, who tore it open anxiously.

"My dear Mr. Carter," it read, "should this letter be delivered to you, it will mean that my worst fears have been realized, and that I am no longer a free agent, else I should have returned to the hotel within the hour fixed. As you know, I have been quite ill, but to-day had somewhat regained my strength. A note was sent to me from the office. It was from Prince Thamen. He had escaped, Heaven knows how, and he pleaded with me to see him before he left for our country, or was again arrested. He had gone to a hotel in the lower part of the city, where he begged me to meet him in the ladies' room at once, as he had arranged for passage on a small coasting vessel to some point in the South, whence he could more easily reach our country.

"I cannot tell why I yielded to his persuasion, for I feel that some evil may befall me, but I have decided to meet him, for at least he is of my own race and blood.

"Nor can I tell why I have been prompted to leave you this note, for, after all, what difference does it make what becomes of me? I have nothing more to live for. The one I loved best has been taken from me, and I have no more interest in life. And yet, there is an inner voice that cries to me to struggle on.

"Should I not return, and should you choose to interest yourself further in my poor behalf, this is all the information that I can give you. I shall leave the Cordelia in one of the taxicabs of the hotel."

When he had finished reading the letter, Nick turned to the clerk.

"Has the taxicab that the princess engaged returned to the stand?" he asked.

"I do not know, Mr. Carter. I never thought of that. I will see, if you wish."

"Please do; and if it has bring the chauffeur in here."

Darrell nodded and left the office. In less than five minutes he returned, accompanied by a chauffeur. He was a bright-appearing young Irishman, and his surprise at his unusual summons showed in his good-natured face.

"You drove the Princess Zora to a downtown hotel?" half queried the detective, as soon as the clerk had closed the office door behind the man.

"Was she a princess? I do know," replied the chauffeur, his eyes opening in amazement. "Sure, an' I drove the lady Mr. Darrell called me taxi for, but it's no notion I had that she was a princess, sir."

"Well, that does not matter, my man. Where did you drive her? Be particular, if you please. I want to know everywhere you went."

"That's an easy one, sir. I drove the la—the princess from the hotel, here, to the Crawford House; she paid me me fare, and I picked up a gent for a few blocks' drive on me way up, an' here I am."

"You left her at the ladies' entrance?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she said nothing to you?"

"Divil a word, sir, barrin', 'what do I owe you?'"

"Thank you. That's all, Darrell."

The chauffeur, whose natural curiosity had been aroused, seemed reluctant to leave the room.

"You don't want to know anything about the little brown man, then, sir?" he asked, turning back just as he reached the door.

"The little brown man?" cried Nick. "What about the little brown man? Why did you not tell me of him?"

"Sure, sir, I answered your questions, and you said, 'that's all.'"

"I guess that's right," said Nick, laughing. "Well, now tell me about the little brown man."

"Well, sir," said the chauffeur, glad of an opportunity to reopen the matter, "when the la—the princess got out of the taxi there was a queer-looking little man standing on the steps of the ladies' entrance to the hotel. As soon as he saw the princess he hopped down two steps at a clip, and before you could say Jack Robinson he whisked her into another taxi that was standing right ahead of me. The chauffeur put on the power just like he's been tipped off to the trick, and there you are, sir. That's the last I saw of the princess."

As the man finished, Nick sprang to his feet.

"Was the taxi that the princess was hurried into one that belongs on the Crawford House stand?" he asked.

"I couldn't be sure of that, sir."

"Would you know the chauffeur if you saw him?"

"That I would, sir."

"Darrell," said the detective, "I am going to take this man with me. Will you see that his taxi is taken care of until he returns. I shall not detain him long."

Then turning to the astonished chauffeur he said:

"I will make it worth your while, my man. You will not lose anything."

"Sure, an' I was not thinking of that, sir; but it's the slick bit of a way ye have of making up other people's minds for them," said the man, with a broad smile.

"That is Nick Carter's way, John," laughed Darrell.

The chauffeur's smile vanished, and his mouth opened with a slight gasp, as he gazed at Nick in wonder.

"An' is it the rale Nick Carter—the detective man—that ye are, sir?" he queried, in an awed whisper.

"Yes, John, I am Nick Carter," said the detective, smiling. "But we have no time to lose. My automobile is waiting outside."

John's expression quickly changed again to one of intense pride. He threw back his shoulders, and buttoned his coat over his swelling breast.

"Lade on, sir, as soon as you like. Sure, I'd go to the divil wid Nick Carter."

Shaking hands with Darrell, and promising to let him know as soon as he learned anything of the princess, Nick Carter, motioning to the eager chauffeur to follow him, slipped out into the lobby, and led the way to his waiting automobile.

In a few words he explained the situation to Chick and Dannenhauer, and then leaped into the front seat with Danny, while the chauffeur squeezed himself in between the two men in the back.

"Crawford House, ladies' entrance, Danny," said Nick.

Danny quickly threw in the clutch, and started the ma-



chine west until he reached Ninth Avenue, when he turned south at a smart clip.

None of the party spoke until the car swung in to the curb at the side entrance of the Crawford House.

There were only two cabs waiting on the stand, their chauffeurs walking up and down on the sidewalk in front of their vehicles.

"Was it either of those two men?" asked Nick, turning to the chauffeur, who was eying the men sharply.

"It was the farther one, sir," replied the chauffeur, unconsciously lowering his voice.

Nick sprang from the car and approached the man indicated. As he did so, he took from his pocket a roll of money and stripped off a two-dollar bill. The detective believed in judiciously applied tips when he wanted information, and wanted it quickly.

"Did you drive a small, dark man and a woman from here about two hours ago?" asked Nick sharply, and without giving the man time to think he continued, holding the bill out conspicuously: "The woman got out of another cab. The man was waiting on the steps of the hotel."

The driver looked at Nick and then at the money. "I did," he said, with a grin.

"Where did you take them?"

"To a pier on the North River. I don't remember the number."

"Any regular line of steamers, or vessels of any kind dock there?"

"No. I think it is an oyster dock. It's two piers below the Red X."

"Where did you drop your fare—at the entrance to the pier?"

"No, sir. The man had me drive them down to the end of the pier."

"Was there a vessel lying there?"

"Yes, sir. A small steamer."

"Did they go aboard of her?"

"Not while I was there, sir."

"Did any one meet them?"

"No. They seemed to be waiting for some one, or for me to drive off."

"Thank you," said Nick, handing the man the money he had held in his hand, and then turning quickly away to his automobile.

"Two piers below the Red X, Danny," said the detective, as he jumped into the car.

Danny, who knew every paving stone in New York, turned the machine quickly and started for West Street.

At the pier indicated he brought the car to a stop, and turned to Nick for further instructions.

"Wait here," said the detective, leaping out of the machine and starting for a small office at the head of the dock. As he did so, he noticed that there was no steamer lying at the end of the pier, as described by the chauffeur.

"Can you tell me if there was a steamer lying at the end of this pier two hours ago?" Nick asked of a young man, the only occupant of the office, as he entered the small room.

"The *Zebra* was lying there up to half an hour ago," replied the clerk, looking lazily up from his writing.

"And she sailed then?"

"Yep."

"This is not the dock of any regular line?"

"No. The *Zebra* is a tramp."

"Can you tell me who are her agents?"

"Hebron & Hebron."

"Thank you. Do you happen to know if she carried any passengers?"

"I saw a man and a woman go aboard just before she sailed. I suppose they were passengers."

"Do you know where she cleared for?"

"No, except that it was for some South American port."

"Thank you."

Nick left the office hurriedly, and, leaping into the car, said to Danny:

"Hebron & Hebron, the shipping agents, Danny."

It so happened that the detective was well acquainted with the firm, and had frequently found the partners valuable allies in some of his water-front cases.

The office of the agents was only a short distance from the pier, and the car soon whirled up to the curb in front of the building.

Turning to the chauffeur, Nick handed him a five-dollar bill.

"I think this will pay you for your time, my man," he said. "I am much obliged to you."

"Sure, an' it's glad I'll be to serve ye, sir, at any time at all. Jist sind for Jack Dever, at the Cordelia, any time ye want a lift, an' it's proud I'll be to help ye."

The man climbed out of the car, his face beaming with pleasure.

Nick turned quickly to his assistant.

"Chick," he said, "we will take up that interrupted South American trip. Jump across town and see how soon Captain Graves can be ready for sea. He is provisioned for six months, I know. Tell him I want to start at the earliest possible moment."

"Dannenhauer, are you game for a sea chase for your bride?" asked the detective, turning to the other man.

"You don't have to ask me that, Mr. Carter," replied Dannenhauer, his strong mouth tightening into a determined line. "I'd go to the end of the earth for her."

"All right. Go with Chick. I will meet you at the house as soon as possible. I must go to the district attorney's office after leaving here. Chick, take charge of all the necessary arrangements for a flying start. We are in this thing to see it through to the end, Dannenhauer."

"I will pay your own price, Mr. Carter," said the German earnestly.

"It's not a question of price," said Nick sharply. "This is my expedition. I am after that little black devil, and his trail is that of your wife. Take the car, Chick. You have more ground to cover than I have."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE OCEAN TRAIL.

"Nick Carter, how are you?" cried a big, ruddy-faced man as the detective entered the private office of Hebron & Hebron, the shipping agents. "I sure am glad to see you. What's doing?"

"How are you, Hebron?" replied Nick, grasping the outstretched hand of the senior member of the firm. "I only want a little information, but I want it quick. You own the *Zebra*?"

"I did this morning. I don't know whether I do or not now."



"Eh? Please tell me about it."

"Easy. An excited little nigger—no, he wasn't a nigger, exactly. Some sort of a South American critter, I believe—called on me this morning and wanted to charter a small steamer ready for sea. I told him I had the *Zebra* coaled and manned, and took him down aboard. He didn't any more than take a look at her abovedecks when he said she'd do, and asked my price for a six months' cruise. I made him a good, stiff price, but he never haggled, but said it was quite satisfactory, and wanted to know if he could sail at once.

"I told him that it was only a matter of getting out his clearance papers, and giving me satisfactory references. He shied at the reference proposition. Said he knew no one here to whom he could appeal; that his mission was a secret one, and had to do with the government of his country. I confess, Nick, that I didn't like his style, although I was a heap interested in what the little cuss might be driving at. I told him that I could not agree to let him have the steamer in any such way as that, and he up and asked me what I would sell the *Zebra* for. I said she was not for sale, but if he wanted to pay me one hundred thousand dollars for her, she was his, and no questions asked. And, blow me, Nick, if he didn't take me up on the spot. He drew a draft for the money on London, and paid for the cable acceptance, and I turned over the *Zebra* to him, crew, coal, and all."

"Did the crew all stand by?"

"Every mother's son of them. I think Captain Jones believed that there was something in the peculiar transaction that might make it worth while for him to play in. He is a bit of a pirate, naturally. Anyhow, I got the clearance papers, the captain took care of the provisioning, and the *Zebra* sailed. And there you are, Nick."

"What do you mean, then, by saying that you do not know whether you own the vessel yet or not?"

"Oh, we signed a little agreement in which I agreed to take over the *Zebra* again for eighty thousand dollars, if she is in reasonably good condition, minus a thousand dollars a month rental, at any time within a year. So you see I am playing both ends against the middle, and stand to make a good winning any way."

"And what was the name of this modern Monte Cristo?"

"The name is as funny as the guy himself. He signed just plain Thamen, without any initials or anything else."

"Yes, that's right," nodded Nick. "Now, what is the destination of the *Zebra*?"

"She cleared as a yacht for a cruise in South American waters. And now, Nick, do you mind telling me what interest you have in this chap?"

"Didn't the name suggest anything to you, Hebron?"

"To tell you the truth, Nick, although it sounded almighty odd to me, it seemed also that I had heard or seen it before."

"You must have read something about the recent murder at the Mammoth?"

"Lord, Nick, that's it!"

"Yes, that's it. This little Thamen is a murderer and a fugitive from justice—and I think that I ought to arrest you for aiding and abetting in his escape."

Nick chuckled as he spoke, and held out his hand to the now astounded shipping man.

"However, in view of the information that you have given, I think I will let you go on your own recognizance. I'm off on an ocean trail, Hebron."

"You are going after him?"

"As fast as the *Ida* can sail."

"Cracky, Nick, it will be a grand race. Of course, the *Zebra* isn't in it with your yacht, but she's got start enough to make it interesting for you."

"The *Ida* will not be far behind her at midnight to-night. Good-by, Hebron."

Nick caught a cab within a block of the shipping office, and was driven rapidly to the office of the district attorney. His name secured him immediate admittance to the presence of the prosecuting officer.

"Gad, Nick, but I am glad to see you. I have been telephoning to your house every five minutes for an hour. I understand from the warden at the Tombs that you have already been informed of the escape of this man Thamen?"

"Yes, I know about it. What have you done?"

"Well, really, Nick, it is not a matter that comes within my department. I am the prosecutor, not the custodian of prisoners. I am naturally interested, however. I believe the usual thing has been done. The van driver, who is responsible for the escape, has been suspended pending an investigation, and the police are doing all that is possible to trace the man. The chief has been shouting for you, and it was in his behalf that I have been trying to reach you."

"No clews have so far been discovered?"

"Not a clew. The man seems to have vanished into thin air."

Nick chuckled.

"No; he didn't go by balloon. He took the water route, which leaves no more trail, however."

"What do you mean, Nick? You know where he is?" exclaimed the puzzled attorney.

"Well, only in a very general way. He is by this time headed pretty well out to sea."

"For Heaven's sake, Nick, I have known you to pull off some pretty rapid tricks, but you don't mean to tell me that you know where this man is!"

"Only that he has put to sea," replied the detective, and then he told the district attorney everything that he had done and learned of the prisoner's disappearance.

"And now what?" asked the prosecutor, dropping helplessly back in his chair.

"And now I am going to take his trail," said Nick, rising quickly.

"On the sea?" gasped the district attorney.

"Yes. I have followed an ocean trail before."

From the district attorney's office, Nick made his way at once to police headquarters. There he was closeted with the chief of police for half an hour, after which he hastened to his home. Chick and Dannenhauer were awaiting him.

"Well?" said the detective, as he entered the library.

"Captain Graves is ready for sea at any time you wish to go aboard, Nick," said Chick.

"Good! Now it is up to us to toss a few things together, and get aboard."

"Joseph is packing a trunk and the grips. I have sent Danny in the auto for Dannenhauer's trunk. He ought to be back as soon as we are ready."

"I have got two or three letters to write. Send Joseph to me when everything is ready."

Nick entered his den, and closed the door after him. For half an hour he was busy, and then there was a rap at the door.



Joseph entered at his summons.

"Mr. Chick told me to tell you that everything is ready, sir," said the man.

"Very well, Joseph. I am going away in my yacht. I do not know how long I shall be gone. I have left a note for Patsy. He will be in charge during my absence."

"Very well, sir."

Nick stepped to a small safe and took out a roll of bills and removed several of large denominations. The rest he thrust into his pocket, together with a handful of gold, which he took from a drawer of the safe. He handed the bills he had taken from the roll to Joseph.

"There is a thousand dollars, Joseph. Give it to Patsy when he returns. I have also left for him a note to my bankers. If I am detained longer than I expect to be they will see that he is supplied with funds until you see me again."

Joseph received the money and the letter with his usual dignity.

"Very well, sir," he replied gravely. "I hope I shall hear from you."

"Only if it is necessary. I can trust you to see that everything goes right in the house during my absence."

"Yes, sir."

A few minutes later Nick, Chick, and Dannenhauer entered the detective's car, and were driven rapidly to the pier where the *Ida* lay.

Captain Graves, a short, stocky man, with English mutton-chop whiskers, met Nick at the gangplank.

"Get under way at once, captain," said Nick, as he climbed aboard, followed by the others. "Danny, see that the trunks are hustled aboard."

In fifteen minutes the head of the *Ida* was pointed for the Narrows.

Nick Carter was off on an ocean trail!

## CHAPTER V.

### AT THE HEELS OF THE QUARRY.

"There she is, Mr. Carter."

It was Captain Graves who spoke, as the detective climbed on the bridge on the morning of the third day out from New York.

The captain pointed to a streak of black smoke almost dead ahead of the *Ida*. The steamer was almost hull down.

"How do you know that is the *Zebra*, Graves?" asked Nick.

"In the first place, from your description of her probable course, it is not likely that we should pick up any other steamer. We are out of all regular lanes of shipping. And then, if you will take a look through the glass you will see that she has two red bands around her smoke-stack. I am pretty well acquainted with that tramp, and have picked her up many a time out of the usual course of coasters."

Nick took the glass that the captain offered him and looked at the line of smoke ahead of them.

"She certainly has two red lines on her stack," he said, as he lowered the glass. "How long will it take us to overhaul her, Graves?"

"It's a stern chase, sir, and, therefore, a long one, sir. She is evidently headed, as you said she would, for the east coast of Yucatan. She seems to be pretty speedy,

but I think the *Ida* will pick her up before daylight to-morrow."

"All right, captain, that will do."

"I can get a couple of knots more out of the *Ida* if you wish, sir."

"No, Graves, I should much prefer that you overhaul her sufficiently so that she cannot give us the slip in the night, and then hold her. I would like her to get closer to the Yucatan coast before I began any aggressive action."

"Very well, sir. I will chop off a couple of miles of her lead, and then hold her well in hand. I shall have her then where she cannot fool me after dark, unless she douses all her glims, and I don't think her captain would dare do that."

Nick shook his head.

"I am not so sure of that. Her present owner is a desperate individual. He is likely to take any chance."

"Maybe you are right, sir. I know Jones is a dare-devil, too, and will take any chance for money."

"Well, do your best to keep her in sight through the night. I don't think she can lose us, anyway. For I am pretty certain of the point for which she is headed."

Nick left the bridge and entered the cabin, where he found Chick and Dannenhauer examining a big map.

"Here we are, Nick," cried Chick, placing his finger on the chart, "according to the captain's latest observations. I am getting to be a great navigator."

Chick was as pleased as a child with a new toy at having worked out the position of the *Ida* on the chart.

Nick smiled, and threw his arm affectionately across the shoulders of his assistant, whom he loved as a son. Then he studied the chart closely and in silence for a few minutes.

"Yes," he said finally, "to-morrow will be the time to strike. Then if he escapes we shall have him holed."

Chick looked at Nick in surprise.

"Do you mind telling me what you are talking about, chief?" he said.

"We have just sighted a steamer that without any reasonable-doubt is the *Zebra*. We are close on her heels. To-morrow we shall round her up."

Dannenhauer sprang to his feet.

"The *Zebra*—we have sighted the *Zebra*, Mr. Carter?" he cried excitedly. "Why not run her down at once? Why wait until to-morrow?"

"There are two very good reasons, Dannenhauer," replied the detective quietly. "First, she is a long way ahead of us—almost hull down. If we gave chase we should overhaul her in the night. This I wish to avoid, as the quarry might take to his hole under cover of darkness. The second reason is practically covered by that. I wish to be able to see where he goes, if, in case anything goes wrong, he should be able to outmaneuver the *Ida*. I do not wish to take any chances of his escape into his own country before I can lay hands on him. He could slink away like a rabbit into his own mountain fastnesses, if he once got ashore without my knowing where."

The impatient Dannenhauer could not but admit that Nick was right, and tried to possess himself in patience, though the thought of his bride almost within sight drove him nearly wild, and he rushed up on deck to get a glimpse of the *Zebra*.

"If we can see the *Zebra*, Nick, the chances are largely



in favor of their having seen us," said Chick, when Dannenhauer had gone on deck.

"Yes, they have probably seen us, Chick, but as Thamen has no reason to suspect that he is being pursued he is not likely to pay any attention to us."

"Are you going to try to capture him before he gets ashore?"

"That will depend upon circumstances. If he gets suspicious he may run for it. That is why I want to keep the *Zebra* well in sight."

The *Ida*, under the skillful guidance of Captain Graves, easily kept the other vessel in sight, and seemingly without arousing any suspicion on the part of the master of the *Zebra*.

On the morning of the second day following they picked up the dim coast line of Yucatan. Nick joined the captain on the bridge.

"Now, Graves," he said, "you can put the *Ida* through her paces. When we are near enough I will try a shot from our little ten-pounder across her bows, as an introduction."

Nick then joined Chick and Dannenhauer in the cabin, while Graves gave orders to crowd on steam.

"We shall be close at her heels inside another hour," Nick announced, "and then I am going to open conversation with her. If she lays to, and I don't think Jones will take chances when our little gun begins to talk, I do not think we shall have any trouble. If not, we shall have to chase her in."

"Your gun isn't heavy enough to force her to lay to, Carter?" asked Dannenhauer anxiously.

"Oh, yes; I can fire a small explosive shell that would blow her out of the water. But I have no right to take such extreme measures in the first place, and I do not care to endanger human life. Besides, there is a woman aboard, Dannenhauer," reminded Nick.

"Yes, yes. What am I thinking of? I believe I am going crazy."

"Keep cool, Dannenhauer," said Nick calmly. "They will not get away from us."

For an hour longer the pursuit was continued, and then Nick, after a brief consultation with Captain Graves, ordered the discharge of the deck gun.

The detective stood on the bridge with his glass to his eyes as the cannon boomed over the calm surface of the sea. He could see that the shot caused a commotion on the deck of the other vessel. A man, apparently the captain, leaped to the bridge, quickly followed by a short man, whom Nick thought he recognized as Prince Thamen. Judging from the gesticulations of the short man, an animated conversation ensued. Then the speed of the *Zebra* seemed to be increased, and the man Nick believed to be Thamen rushed from the bridge.

The detective scowled, and his lips set in a hard line. He had not calculated on this display of defiance. He gave a sharp command to the captain, and the speed of the *Ida* was perceptibly increased. She began rapidly to overhaul the *Zebra*.

After another consultation with Graves, Nick retired to the cabin.

"What are you going to do, chief?" asked Chick.

"I am going to run her to shore if that man Jones hasn't got sense enough to lay to," replied the detective grimly. "We ought to be within hailing distance in another hour."

It was scarcely more than that when Captain Graves summoned Nick on deck. The *Zebra* was less than half a mile ahead, and the coast was not more than two miles away.

Everything was plainly discernible on the deck of the steamer, but Nick noticed that Thamen was nowhere to be seen. The *Ida* was some distance to the starboard of the *Zebra*, and the latter was laying a course that was carrying her obliquely toward the shore, which was on her port bow. Therefore she was between the *Ida* and the coast line.

Captain Jones was on the bridge, and, as Nick appeared, he gave some command through the speaking tube that connected with the engine room. In another moment the steamer's propeller was churning the water, and her speed was rapidly diminishing.

"Are you Captain Jones, of the *Zebra*?" shouted Nick, as the *Ida*, skillfully handled by Captain Graves, slowed up almost under the side of the other vessel.

"Aye, aye; and who the devil may you be?" returned the captain gruffly.

"I'll tell you that when I come aboard," replied the detective, hurrying to the tender that Graves had ordered lowered.

"I haven't sent out any invitations for a party aboard the *Zebra*," snapped Jones, as Nick, followed by Chick and Dannenhauer, stepped into the small boat.

"I'll waive any formality," said Nick, with a smile, as the boat swung under the *Zebra's* side. "Toss over a ladder, please."

For a moment Jones hesitated, and looked angrily at the detective. What he saw in Nick's eyes evidently caused him to change his mind. He sullenly threw over a rope ladder, and the three men in the boat scrambled over the side of the *Zebra*, and faced the skipper.

"Now," grunted the latter, "perhaps you will tell me who in blazes you are, and what you want?"

"I am a New York detective," said Nick quietly, "and I want the man who is your passenger."

"A detective, eh?" growled the captain, snapping his fingers. "I don't care that for detectives."

"Perhaps not; but my business is not with you. I want your passenger."

"Haven't any passenger."

"Didn't you bring a man and a woman down from New York?"

"Uh-huh; but the man is the owner, and the woman was his guest—some sort of a relative, I guess."

"Well, then, your owner," said Nick. "That is undoubtedly more correct. I want him."

"Gone ashore, Mr. Detective," grinned the captain, turning and pointing to a small steam launch that Nick had not noticed before, and which was now close inshore. The launch had evidently kept the *Zebra* between herself and the *Ida* so that she could not be seen from the latter vessel.

"The lady has gone ashore, too," continued the captain, his grin broadening. "Can I do anything for you, sir?"

Nick's lips tightened, but he turned from the man without a word, climbed down into the tender of the *Ida*, followed by Chick and Dannenhauer.

"You are not going to let him escape in that way. Mr. Carter?" asked Dannenhauer, as the three again entered the cabin of the detective's yacht.

"Not in that way, or in any other way," replied Nick



quickly. "I'll get Thamen if I have to follow him into the heart of his own heathenish country. But we have got to have arms, and prepare for what may possibly be a long trip into those wilds. You will go with us?"

"Most assuredly!"

"Chick, have the steward put up a knapsack of food. I will see to the arms. We must lose no time, for that devil, of course, knows the country, and while he may not anticipate pursuit, he will undoubtedly be cautious."

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN THE JUNGLE.

Both Nick and Chick had a thorough knowledge of woodcraft, and they had no difficulty in striking the trail of Thamen and his companion as soon as they reached the shore. But then their difficulties began. With his knowledge of the country, Thamen had no trouble in making his way through the dense jungle which was encountered a short distance in from the shore. With Nick's party it was slower work. While Thamen had evidently not made any effort to conceal his trail, it was not always an easy matter to follow it through the tangled undergrowth. The pursuers' progress was, therefore, much slower than that of the couple they followed.

Nick, however, was not easily disheartened, and after burrowing into the jungle for several hours they came upon signs that showed that they had made some gain. The trail was fresher. Evidently the woman could not keep up with the pace of the man, and he had been obliged to consider her physical limitations.

"We will pick 'em shortly, chief," said Chick, as Nick called his attention to the signs.

"We will get them, all right. Chick, if we have to follow them clean to their lair," replied the detective, his face set and determined. "But I should much prefer to get my hands on Thamen before he reaches the little brown men's headquarters."

An hour later, Chick, who was in the lead of the party, stopped short in a small clearing.

"Thamen's party has grown, Nick," he said, pointing to the ground.

The detective carefully examined the new signs that Chick had discovered.

"I should say that they had fallen in with a small party of the natives," said Nick, straightening up. "And there is a woman in the party, too."

"Yes, Zora, of course."

"No; another woman. See, she wears some sort of moccasins like the others."

As he spoke, Nick pointed to a scarcely discernible footprint that was even smaller than the small footprints of the men.

"Right, Nick. I should say that we must be getting dangerously near to their hang out."

Nick nodded.

"The presence of a woman in this new party would indicate that their settlement is not far off," he said.

Again they took up the trail, which, now that the party had been so much augmented, was not difficult to follow.

"Gee! See who's here!"

It was Chick who spoke. He was a little in advance of the others, and he quickly darted behind a tree. His example was followed by Nick and Dannenhauer, although they did not at first see what had startled Chick.

Suddenly the thick brush in front of them parted, and a small, brown man stepped out into the path, peering around anxiously. He was dressed in a loose tunic, or shirt, that reached to his knees, and was belted at the waist. His legs and feet were bare.

"I think we need that little gentleman in our business," whispered Nick, and, suiting action to the word, the detective sprang from cover. Before the startled native could put up any kind of a defense Nick had flung himself upon him and bore him to the ground as if he had been an infant, at the same time clapping his hand over the little man's mouth to prevent any outcry.

"Slip the bracelets on him, Chick," whispered Nick.

Neither of the detectives was ever without a light pair of handcuffs.

Chick promptly brought the little man's hands behind his back and snapped on the cuffs.

"Now, twist up your handkerchief, and gag him. We cannot afford to have him bring the whole swarm around our ears."

This operation was quickly performed, also, and then the detective stood looking down at his prisoner thoughtfully.

"I cannot see of what use is the prisoner, Chick," whispered Dannenhauer. "We cannot talk to him, what?"

"Keep your eye on the chief," replied Chick, with a grin. "He will talk to him, all right."

There was silence for another minute. Nick was evidently concentrating.

Then suddenly he spoke. What he said was like so much gibberish to Chick and Dannenhauer, but the little brown man opened his eyes, and looked at Nick in astonishment. Then he nodded his head vigorously, as if answering a question in emphatic affirmative.

Nick could speak fluently in nearly all of the modern languages, and some of the dead ones. He had spoken in a mixture of Spanish and Aztec, and he had asked: "Do you understand me?"

There was another pause. Nick had to formulate his sentences like a schoolboy with a foreign tongue. Then he said:

"We mean no harm to you. If I let you speak will you promise not to make an outcry?"

Again the man nodded vigorously:

"I am going to take a chance and trust him," said Nick, as he removed the handkerchief from the man's mouth.

Whether it was because he had some regard for his word, or because he feared his captors, the little man did not make a sound when he was free to speak.

With some difficulty the following conversation was then carried on in the mixed tongue:

"How far are we from the principal dwelling place of the people of Thamen?"

"Half a sun."

"Were you one of the party that passed on before us?"

The man shook his head emphatically.

"No, no!" he cried. "I belong to the other house."

"The other house?" repeated Nick, puzzled.

"Yes, yes; the house of Yomen. Thamen belongs to the new house—the people of the devil!"

As he spoke, the man made a sign that might have been construed as a charm against the evil eye of the people of the devil.



party politics," said Nick to his companions. "It may help some in our business."

After fifteen minutes of laborious conversation, interspersed with bits of sign language, Nick turned to his companions and said:

"It seems that the people of this peculiar country, like most other communities, are split into two factions—conservative and progressive—but, strangely enough, the progressives, instead of being found among the people, are represented by the royal house and its followers, while the leaders of the common people are opposed to all change. And it seems that the latter element is the stronger, and that the house of Thamen is tottering, and there is revolution in the air. This little chap is one of the leaders of the people. I think we can make some use of him."

"What's the little cuss doing so far away from his tepee?" asked Chick, with a chuckle.

"A party was out hunting, when they met Thamen and Zora. The prince promptly pressed them into service as an escort, but this chap ducked. As a leader, he is open in his opposition to the royal house, but the rank and file of the would-be revolutionists are a little wary about declaring their convictions."

"So they bowed to the commands of the prince, eh?"

"Yes, and toted the prince and Zora back to the royal palace in state, on litters that they improvised in the jungle. I am glad for the sake of Zora, for she must have been pretty nearly all in. A taste of civilized life takes the staying power out of the most rugged of the primitive races. I dare say the prince welcomed the opportunity to be toted, also."

"What do you propose to do with the little insurrectionist?"

"I have briefly made it clear to him that we want Thamen and Zora, and, like a good revolutionist, he welcomes anything that will make trouble for the other fellow. In the first place, he is to guide us to the stronghold of Thamen. After that I shall decide what it is best to do."

Nick spoke a few words to the little man, and the party again set out after Thamen, but this time they did not attempt to follow the trail, but took another route known to their guide.

They traveled for some time over a difficult mountain trail, and Nick calculated that they had ascended about two thousand feet, when their guide came to a sudden stop and made a motion for them to be quiet.

When they reached him they saw that they were at the top of the mountain, and below them lay a wide, fertile valley. Nick uttered a sharp exclamation of wonder as he saw that through the valley wound a road apparently as well built as any macadam road in the United States. It was wide and smooth, and ran like a ribbon through the green valley, disappearing in a pass at the farther end.

There were several heavy two-wheeled carts, like the market carts of European peasants, on the road, and as Nick looked he saw the party bearing Thamen and Zora enter the road just below them.

"How much farther?" asked Nick of the guide.

The man pointed to the farther pass.

"Can we reach it without following the open road?"

The man nodded, and, without a word, turned and made his way into the thick woods at the left. After working their way through the thick growth for two or three hun-

dred yards, they came upon a scarcely defined trail which the guide, however, followed with remarkable ease.

The trail led along the side of the valley until it reached a point a quarter of a mile to the left of the pass through which the road ran. Here it ascended to the top of the farther mountain, where a broad plateau spread out before the eyes of the party. They made their way across this until at the extreme edge they could look down into another valley, even more fertile than the one which now lay behind them. Into this the road entered from the pass.

But the most remarkable feature of the picture that was presented to them was a great rocky uplift that rose like an island from the green fields below. The sides were precipitous, and fully fifty feet from the level of the plain, it was topped by a plateau. And on this upper plain was built a small city of low, white adobe structures, dominated by one larger and more impressive than the rest, which stood above the others fronting on the steepest side of the aerial island.

"Look upon the ancestral halls of your bride, Dannenhauer," said Nick jokingly, pointing to the large building which was evidently the royal palace.

There was no reply, and the detective, looking around, saw that the German, who had brought up the rear, was nowhere to be seen.

Chick and the native turned at Nick's exclamation of dismay. They could see some distance back down the trail which they had followed, but Dannenhauer was nowhere in sight!

"Dannenhauer!" called Nick, as loud as he dared to raise his voice.

There was no reply, and Nick turned sharply to their guide. For a moment he was suspicious that the little man was in some way responsible for the disappearance of Dannenhauer, and then he realized how impossible that was. The man had been in advance of them all the way.

"I believe the brown devils have got him, Chick," he said.

"But how, chief?"

"That's for us to find out."

As he spoke, Nick began to slowly move back along the trail, examining the ground carefully as he went. About a quarter of a mile back he stopped and dropped to his knees.

"Here's where they got him," he said finally, getting to his feet again, after a sharp inspection of the ground and the surrounding undergrowth. "There were three of them. They must have been pretty slick to have taken him away without a sound. I wonder if our little friend, here, can tell us anything about it."

While the detective had been examining the natural signs, the guide had been making an investigation of his own. Now he approached Nick, and began to talk volubly and excitedly.

"Slower, slower!" cried the detective, striving to get some meaning out of the man's jumble of Spanish and Aztec.

It was fully fifteen minutes before Nick could pick out the meaning of the man's words. Then, turning to Chick, he said:

"The men who have captured Dannenhauer, according to this man—and I believe he is speaking the truth—are probably members of a hunting party. They saw us approaching, and lay in wait for us in one of these big trees



at the side of the trail. When we had passed they dropped down, nailed Dannenhauer in their catlike manner, and whisked him out of the way before we discovered his disappearance."

"But I cannot understand why Dannenhauer did not make some outcry. He was not more than twenty yards or so in our rear at any time."

"Inasmuch as we did not see him captured, we cannot judge just how far he might have dropped behind. At all events, I believe that that was the way the thing was done. There seems to be no other explanation possible. And as to his making no outcry, it seems that the natives carry a weapon very much like a garrote, I should say from this man's description. They probably cut off his wind, and had him powerless in jigtime. They appear to be very nimble and animallike. Here is where they dragged him into the woods."

Nick pointed to the underbrush at a place where it was evident, to even an unpracticed eye, that it had been recently disturbed by a large body passing through it.

"Well, now what do you propose to do?"

"Get Dannenhauer," said Nick.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CHAMBER OF THE IDOL.

Nick Carter had been right. Franz Dannenhauer was a prisoner of the little brown men. And the manner of his capture had been very much as the detective and the native guide had surmised.

Three hunters had discovered the party from the yacht on the trail. Convinced that they could not take the entire party prisoners, they had decided to try to capture the last man. They had made their way through the woods, coming out on the trail in advance of Nick. Climbing into a tree, they had waited until the party had passed. Then, dropping catlike to the ground, they had had no difficulty in capturing Dannenhauer by means of a weapon somewhat resembling the bolo of the natives of southern South America. This was a thong of leather weighted on one end. Unlike the bolo, which is weighted on both ends, and released from the hand when it is whirled into the air on its mission, the weapon of the brown men was meant for work at close quarters. The unweighted end was held in the hand while the weighted end described a circle that included within its circumference the object that it was desired to encompass. Around this it wrapped itself in quickly tightening coils. The action and result were much like that which follows the cast of a lasso.

As it happened, Dannenhauer was some distance behind the rest of the party when they passed under the tree in which the three hunters were concealed. The weapon, skillfully thrown, encircled his neck and arms before he could make any outcry, or in any way defend himself. He was dragged to the ground and whisked into the jungle without the slightest sound. There he was bound hand and foot, and a gag placed in his mouth.

His captors were not rough, but worked with great dexterity, and when they had him trussed up they held a council of war.

Having come to some unanimous conclusion, Dannenhauer's feet were unbound, and he was marched ahead of his captors through the forest.

They struck a course that soon brought them out on the highway, which they followed at a rapid pace. Reach-

ing the base of a rocky uplift upon which was situated the village, they paused at a point about midway along the face of the cliff. The road continued on around the island of rock.

Dannenhauer, in whose eyes the fierce light of helpless rage that had flashed into them when he had found himself a captive, had given place to a look of wonder, gazed at the rocky wall in amazement. Did they propose to haul him up those ragged and precipitous cliffs?

But his captors made no move toward action of any kind. They stood stolidly gazing at the blank stone wall before them.

Suddenly Dannenhauer was conscious of a slight grinding sound that seemed to come from the cliff. He noticed that the eyes of the men seemed to be fixed on one point in the rocky uplift. He followed their gaze, and his eyes rested on a large boulder that jutted out at the base of the wall. And as he looked he could have sworn that it trembled perceptibly.

Now he was sure!

There was a distinct jar, and the corner of the rock that was seemingly embedded in the side of the cliff moved outward fully an inch!

Dannenhauer instinctively stepped back, as if he feared the rocks of the cliff were crumbling. He was startled, but only for a moment. Then he realized that the rock was moving slowly, but at regular intervals, and that it must be in obedience to some impulse imparted by human hands.

His captors, too, were regarding it calmly, as if entirely familiar with the movement.

Soon a slight grating noise was distinguishable as the rock continued to swing outward like a door, and finally a dark opening was revealed. The rock was nothing but a cleverly concealed door that was operated by some simple mechanical contrivance from within.

The little men now pushed Dannenhauer toward the entrance, and as he approached he saw that a flight of roughly hewn steps ascended into the darkness within.

A push from behind indicated that he was to ascend, and he began slowly to climb the stairway.

When he had climbed upward a few feet light began to penetrate the passage, and, coming to a sharp turn, he found himself standing on a broad platform of stone. Above he could see the sky. From that point the steps ascended through an open cleft in the rock.

Again the little men behind urged him on, and he continued the upward climb, turning now to the right and now to the left, until at last they came out upon the plateau. But here Dannenhauer found that they were inclosed by a high stockade with a heavily fortified door at the opposite side. The village was practically impregnable to the attack of an enemy.

Dannenhauer, the gag having been removed from his mouth, had made several attempts to make his captors understand him, but had given it up as impossible. At the name of Zora they had shown understanding and surprise, and had talked volubly but unintelligibly.

"It's no use," growled Dannenhauer. "They know the name, all right, and from what she has told me, I believe this is the home of her people. And, if it is, I shall find her before long, if they don't decide to cut my throat."

The men made no move to leave the inclosure into which they entered, but seemed to be waiting. Presently a sound



came from the other side of the heavy door. Then it swung outward slowly, and Thamen stood in the opening. He gazed for a moment at Dannenhauer, and then his face, that had worn an expression of disdain, paled suddenly, and into his eyes flashed a light of terror. He leaped back until he again stood outside the inclosure.

"You!" he gasped. "You—you have come back from the dead?"

For a moment Dannenhauer was dumfounded, and then the truth flashed on him. This man was Thamen, and he believed that he was looking upon the ghost of the man he had slain in the Mammoth!

Dannenhauer's captors, although not understanding the words spoken by Thamen, were imbued with the fear that they could see was imparted by their prisoner, and fell back in dismay.

Thamen's fright, however, was only momentary. He stepped back into the inclosure, and gazed at the prisoner in amazement.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "and what brings you here?"

"I am the cousin of the man you killed," replied Dannenhauer sternly, "and I am here to demand my bride!"

Thamen had now recovered complete possession of himself.

"Where are the others who are with you?" he asked.

"I will let them speak for themselves," answered Dannenhauer, though he could not help wondering just how they would be able to do so. But, like every one else who had at any time associated with Nick Carter, he felt a blind confidence in this remarkable man.

Thamen spoke a few words to the guard, who by this time had recovered from their panic, and they at once approached Dannenhauer, and hustled him out of the inclosure, and out to the plateau. In front of him rose the white wall of the larger building which Nick had designated as the palace. And such in truth it was, in so far as it was the dwelling place of what might be termed the royal family.

A door, which seemed to be constructed of heavy iron bars, opened at their approach, and they entered what appeared to be a subterranean chamber. The floor and walls were constructed of large, flat stones, and there was around the four walls a low stone bench, except at the place where the door entered, and opposite where another gave exit from the chamber.

There was no other furniture in the chamber, but in the center rose an object about ten feet high, and draped in heavy red cloth. When the door by which they had entered was closed, there was no light in the room except that furnished by a lamp hung high on the ceiling, which was also of stone.

"I am sorry to inconvenience you," said Thamen, a cruel smile curling the corner of his mouth, "but I shall have to ask you to put up with these accommodations until we learn the whereabouts of your companions, or your fate is decided upon by the council. In the meantime I should advise you to make no attempt to escape, for that will be impossible, and will be met with instant death."

He then gave an order to the guard, who at once searched Dannenhauer, removing nothing from his person, however, but his revolver. His hands were then unbound, and with a mocking bow Thamen, followed by the little men, left the chamber by the farther door.

Dannenhauer heard the clang of a heavy lock. He sat

down on one of the stone benches, and stretched his cramped arms. His prison, indeed, seemed to defy escape.

But his indomitable spirit was not crushed.

"At least fate has brought me to my bride," he whispered, as a smile lighted his face at the thought of the woman he so passionately loved. "I will find some way to reach her. Ah, if I could only let her know that I am alive and near her!"

When the circulation had returned to his arms and hands he began to look about his prison.

The strange, draped object first commanded his attention. He rose and walked toward it. He hesitated for a moment, and then thrust out his hand, and, seizing one of the folds of the drapery, pulled it aside.

What he saw caused him to drop the cloth, and start back with a sharp cry.

"Bah!" he cried, shaking himself. "It's only one of their heathen idols!"

Again he approached the draped object, and threw aside the cloth so that it disclosed the thing beneath.

It was indeed an idol, and a hideous one, too. It was a carved and painted figure, somewhat resembling a billiken, and about three times the size of a human being. On its face was a ghastly grin, and its eyes, which were formed from some sort of brilliant gems, sparkled horribly in the dim light of the lamp.

"You are certainly a fierce-looking roommate, but I guess you are harmless enough," growled Dannenhauer, as he pulled the drapery farther aside, until he had uncovered the entire grotesque figure.

"This must be the chamber of worship," he muttered, as he gazed at the silent idol with a sort of fascination. "Wonder if they will hold services soon?"

Click!

The sound seemed to come from inside the idol!

Click, click, click!

"Say, old chap, I'm not a telegraph operator," muttered Dannenhauer, gazing in startled wonder at the image.

Click, click, click!

"Lord! It's moving."

He was right. The image was moving. With each clicking sound it advanced an inch or two toward him!

"Now, what kind of devilry is this?" muttered Dannenhauer, backing slowly away from the now steadily advancing figure. "These people seem to be well up in applied mechanics. First we have a sliding rock, and now it's a dancing idol!"

There was a louder click, and the figure trembled and apparently came to a stand.

"What does it mean? It didn't do that without help, and it certainly means something. But what?"

As he spoke Dannenhauer stepped farther back so that he could see the spot from which the image had moved. As he did so he noticed that the stone slab that had supported the idol, also began to tremble, and then to slowly rise. The stone was pushed upward by a framework of iron, similar in mechanical contrivance to a sidewalk elevator.

And as it rose, Dannenhauer could see that a human figure, wrapped in a cloak, was rising just below the stone, as if standing on a platform underneath.

The big blond giant had no fear of anything human, and the red blood leaped through his veins again, and he laughed aloud in relief.



"Apparently this is my private elevator, and I am to have a caller," he chuckled, instinctively feeling for his missing revolver. "Well, if there is only one I guess I can take care of him, all right."

He advanced toward the rising figure as he spoke, ready to meet any move of his unknown visitor.

"Might just as well throw off that bath robe, and let me see who you are," he called out, laughing. "And it would have been more polite to have sent up your card first."

The platform on which the rising figure stood now reached the level of the floor of the chamber, and stopped with the sound of a clamping bolt.

Then the figure stepped forward and threw aside the enveloping cloak

"Zora!"

"Franz!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SECRET PASSAGE.

With the knowledge of woodcraft and trailing possessed by both Nick and Chick it was an easy matter for them to follow the captors of Dannenhauer, so far as tracing their course. But the physical task was more difficult, for the natives, familiar with the country and the nature of the undergrowth, and presumably armed with weapons suited to clearing the way, made more rapid progress. Their little prisoner, however, proved an efficient aid.

There could be no question that he was eager to aid them in the capture of Thamen. With a small, crude, but effective ax that he carried, he hacked their way through where, now and then, he left the marked trail to take a way that proved to be a shortening of the course.

In this way, although they did not make as rapid progress as those they pursued, they managed to gain upon them somewhat, and when they reached the highway they had them well in sight.

Nick's first impulse was to attack the party at once, but his better judgment prevailed. He was confident that, even without the aid of their revolutionary prisoner—in whom he did not place much dependence—they could rescue Dannenhauer, but probably with the result that they would all fall into the hands of the little brown men before they could make their way out of the enemy's country. Nick decided that strategy was best, and restrained his natural desire to rush to the aid of Dannenhauer.

"Nothing was ever gained by precipitate action, Chick," he replied to the impatient plea of his assistant to attack the party. "Besides that, I am very sure that Dannenhauer would not thank us for rescuing him, and at the same time destroying, perhaps, all chance of releasing his bride—for I believe that the girl will be as much of a prisoner in the hands of Thamen as is Dannenhauer, although probably her position will not be as dangerous. Have patience, Chick, we will get them yet. Thunder! What in the name of all that is good is doing there?"

The rock in the cliff had just rolled back, and the prisoner was thrust through the opening that was revealed. When they had all entered the watchers could see the rock slip back into place.

"Looks like magic from here," said Chick. "These little chaps are some punkins, after all."

Nick turned to the native without reply.

The man was watching the proceeding stolidly. It was apparently nothing new to him.

"Is that the entrance to the upper plateau?" asked the detective, as soon as he could find words.

The man shook his head. Then he began to talk slowly, in his peculiar lingo, in order that Nick might follow him, and this is what the detective was able to translate to Chick:

"That is a private entrance to the palace, or whatever they chose to call the abode of their rulers. It seems that the main entrance to the village is on the other side of the hill. It is through this entrance that we shall have to find our way, as the other way is strongly guarded at all times. The main trouble is that the secret of that swinging rock is known only to Thamen and his family. And the face of the cliffs is absolutely unscalable, except by means of a rope and with the assistance of some one above."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I am going to take a long chance, and trust this chap with the revolutionary proclivities."

"Do you think he is safe?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"I should be inclined to doubt him if we were not playing into his hands. I have made it as clear to him as I can that it is our purpose to remove Thamen and Zora, and that the prince stands a very small show of ever returning to his native clime when I once get him out of it. With him gone, the little revolutionists will have things pretty much their own way. I think he appreciates the situation, and that we can trust him. At all events I see no other way out of it."

Nick took his notebook from his pocket and began to write rapidly.

"What's the game, Nick?" asked Chick who was watching him curiously.

"Simply this: I am writing a note to Zora, asking her to see that the sliding-rock entrance is opened as soon after dark as she can arrange it, and we will do the rest."

"And you are going to send the note in by his nibs?"

"Yes. He will tell the story of his capture, and fake a story of escape, locating us at a point on the other side of the valley, so that if Thamen decides to attack us he will be misled for a time—long enough, I hope, for us to have got Dannenhauer and Zora out of his clutches."

"Don't overlook the fact that these little chaps are probably pretty good woodmen. Is it not possible that pursuit of us has already been started? The men who captured Dannenhauer will undoubtedly report our whereabouts."

"That is quite true, but we have got to take some chances, and there is nothing that we can undo. We can only take as many precautions in our future movements as possible, and trust to luck for the rest."

In pursuance of the plan which Nick had decided to follow, the guide led them to a place of concealment as near to the swinging rock as they dared to go, until darkness should fall, and then with the note to Zora thrust within his tunic he started at a rapid pace on a back track, destroying as he went, as many of the traces of their recent passage as possible.

With a patience that was the result of the studied



exercise of self-control, Nick and Chick settled down to await the coming of darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

With a wild cry of joy, Dannenhauer had recognized the cloaked figure that had so strangely entered his prison, and had clasped Zora in his arms, in a frenzy of happiness.

When their emotions had become somewhat calmer, each briefly recounted the experiences through which they had passed since their separation, and up to the time that Zora, believing him dead, and without further interest in life, had allowed herself to be practically kidnaped by Thamen with little or no resistance.

"But how, dearest, did you learn that I was alive—and here?" asked Dannenhauer, when she had concluded her story.

"Believing that he had you here completely at his mercy, Thamen could not refrain from gloating over his triumph. He told me first of the fortunate accident by which your life was saved, and how your cousin had died in your place. But then, of course, I could not understand it, nor how it had happened; but the fact that you were alive was enough. I cared for nothing else. I did not try to conceal my happiness, and in his anger he told me where he had imprisoned you, and that there would now be no cousin to save you from death.

"I cannot now understand how I had sufficient control over myself to repress the wild cry of joy that sprang to my lips, for I knew then that you were saved to me!"

"Saved to you, my darling! Oh, I would that that were true, but I can only see that every moment you spend here increases your danger of discovery, and then Heaven knows what persecution may follow, from which I may be helpless to shield you. In my great and unexpected happiness I had forgotten the danger that you must have incurred by giving to me this moment of joy!"

A joyous smile overspread the face of the girl, and a low, suppressed laugh broke upon her lips.

"Ah, dearest, I had forgotten that you did not understand why my heart cried out in gladness when I learned that you were imprisoned here. Listen! I am the only living person that knows of the existence of the secret passage through the idol! It was built secretly, at the time that the custom of living sacrifices was abandoned by my people. My great grandfather, almost in his dotage, still clung to the old beliefs. With his own hands he built the passage, and on every feast day he would bring some small living animal, like a bird or a rabbit, and sacrifice it before the God of Bud. That is the family name of that fat old gentleman who is to prove such a good friend to us, dear."

Even in a situation that was still fraught with much danger, Zora laughed like a child, as she pointed to the grinning idol.

"I was a great favorite of my grandfather," she continued, "and one day he failed to take the usual precautions to hide his secret. He failed to bar the door of his room, and I rushed in to find a stone removed from the floor, and my grandfather's head just disappearing into the darkness below. With strange presence of mind for a child, I barred the door, and, returning to the hole in the floor, began to descend the roughly hewn steps after my grandfather.

"He did not discover me until I stepped out into the chamber here. Then his wrath was great. I thought at first that he would strike me down at his feet. But finally he became calmer. His love for me, I think, saved me. He told me that what he did was ordered by the gods whom his people had denied, and to turn aside their wrath. I was frightened and impressed by what he told me, and took a solemn oath never to reveal his secret. For some reason, ever since I have grown to know that it is all meaningless fanaticism, I have guarded his secret. And now you know, Franz, why my heart leaped with joy when I learned that your place of imprisonment was here!"

"It seems as if we did owe something to those old heathen gods of your ancestors," said Dannenhauer, smiling down into the bright face of his bride that he held close to his breast. "And now, as you seem to be better equipped with inside information, what do you suggest as a plan of escape from these ancestral halls of yours, dear?"

"I must return at once before I am missed, and I will try to discover what Thamen intends to do. If no immediate action is to be taken, you will not hear from me again—"

"Zora!"

"Listen! Let me finish, sir!" she whispered, raising herself on tiptoe until she could press her lips to his. "If you do not hear from me again, you will know that all is well for the present, and as soon as darkness falls, and I can safely make my way here, we will slip out of this dungeon, and join the Carters. I shall be in no danger. I have strong friends, even among those who would overthrow the royal house, for my sympathies are with them, and they know it. Come, let me show you the mechanism of this idol-guarded passage, and should any danger threaten you before my return, you can take refuge there until I join you."

They stepped together on the platform of the elevator. Zora touched a spring, and the platform began at once to sink until the stone again closed over the floor above their heads, when Dannenhauer heard a slight rumbling sound.

"That is the idol rolling back into place over the stone," Zora explained. "Now everything in the sacrifice chamber is restored to its usual order."

"Your ancestors were certainly clever mechanics," said Dannenhauer admiringly.

"Now we will return to the chamber, and I will show you how the passage is opened from above," said the girl. Pressing another spring the elevator began again to rise. When the platform had clicked into place, she stepped off on the floor of the chamber, followed by Dannenhauer.

Then she touched the spring, and the platform descended until the stone settled back into its place in the floor, when the idol slowly rolled over it.

"Now we are prisoners together, Franz," cried the girl, throwing her arms around his neck.

"Yes, but I do not like it, dear," replied Dannenhauer, looking at Zora in half fright, for a moment fearing that it was some subterfuge by which she meant to share his fate with him. "Suppose that old piece of machinery should fail to work again."



"Ah, but it will not. See! This is your part to learn."

The girl ran quickly to the front of the image, leaped lightly onto its crossed knees, and, reaching up, pushed with her finger on the blazing jewel that formed the right eye of the grinning idol.

Immediately there was a slight rumbling sound, and the image began to move slowly forward as it had done when Zora had first entered the chamber.

There was a slight click when it came to a stop, and the stone in the floor that had been thus exposed began to rise.

"You see grandfather's elevator will not fail us," cried the girl, leaping down from the idol. "And now I must leave you, for it will soon be dark, and we cannot lose any time."

As she spoke, she threw her arms around his neck, kissed him passionately, and then releasing herself from his embrace, stepped on the platform, touched the spring, and slowly sank out of sight.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A DESPERATE CHANCE.

Nick and Chick, safely hidden from view, waited as patiently as they could for the fall of darkness. They kept constant watch on the sliding rock, but it was not again disturbed while daylight lasted.

"Suppose your messenger fails you, Nick?" said Chick, who was growing nervous because of his inaction. His patience was not so well trained as his chief's.

"There is, of course, a chance of that, but I think it is very remote. Our interests are, in a way, identical. We want Thamen, and he wants to get rid of him. If we take him off their hands we shall save the little revolutionists great trouble. I think our messenger appreciates that.

"There is, however, another possibility of failure that I confess worried me some. Zora may not know the secret of the sliding rock, or may be prevented from manipulating it if she does."

"And then what?" queried Chick. "Our friend Dannenhauer, I imagine, is not in a very enviable position in the hands of Thamen."

"No. But we will save him, Chick, and his bride, too, out of that nest of half-civilized barbarians, or my name is not Nick Carter! I will wait two hours after sundown, and then if we hear nothing from Zora, I will take some action myself."

"Heigh-ho," sighed Chick, to whom action always appealed strongly. "I wish it was two hours after sundown now."

Darkness was falling rapidly now, and it was with some difficulty that they could distinguish the rock. The strain of focusing the eyes through the darkness finally became so great that they took turns in watching the rock.

Nearly an hour passed when Chick whispered to Nick, who was sitting with his head in his hands:

"She's moving, chief—she's moving!"

Nick looked up quickly.

"You are right, Chick," he said, when eyes again accustomed themselves to the distance. "Now for some action!"

The next moment the detective was picking his way

cautiously toward the rock, that was slowly swinging. Chick followed close at his heels.

There was no moon, but the light from the stars made their forms dangerously visible, as they slipped hurriedly across the open space into the shadow of the aerial island.

When they had come within a few feet of the rock, Nick dropped suddenly to the ground, dragging Chick down with him. At the same time he drew his revolver.

"There is some one coming out!" he whispered to the astonished Chick.

His quick eye had penetrated even the blackness of the entrance that was now fully unclosed!

As he spoke, two figures darted silently out, and then paused for a moment as if in doubt as to which direction to take.

Then, as suddenly as he had dropped, Nick sprang to his feet again.

"It's Dannenhauer and a woman!" he cried, under his breath. "Come!"

In a moment more he was beside the astounded couple.

"It is I—Nick Carter," he whispered. "Who is with you?"

"It is Zora—my wife. She arranged our escape."

"Fine!" exclaimed Nick, glancing approvingly at the slight figure clinging to her husband's arm. "Mrs. Dannenhauer has saved me a lot of time and trouble, to say nothing of possible danger. Now listen: We have no time to spare. I see the rock has not rolled back into place."

"No. It is operated by a spring that is worked by a lever at the head of the staircase inside which leads to the level of the upper plateau."

"Good. Now tell me quickly what there is above. In other words, tell me how you would retrace your steps to the place from which you escaped."

"Beyond this rock there is a stone stairway that leads to the upper level. There I would enter a sort-of yard or fenced inclosure with a door at the opposite side. Passing through this door I should be under the walls of the palace, and in front of me I should see an iron-barred gate that opens into a lower chamber of the palace. It is constructed of stone—floor, walls, and ceiling. In the center stands an idol. Behind the idol is a sort of cage that looks like one of those elevators that rise up through the sidewalk in your big cities. By stepping on the platform, and pressing a spring on the upright support near the level of your waist on the right-hand side, the cage will descend until the stone that forms the roof sinks into its place on the floor, and the idol moves back and covers the stone. You are then facing a staircase of hewn stone that leads up. This is as far as I can take you. I have probed no further into the strange mysteries of these people. Zora can tell you what there is above."

"Yes, yes," said Nick eagerly, turning to the girl. "The staircase leads—"

"To the floor above the idol chamber," replied the girl, quickly taking up the description. "It enters the chamber that was once that of my great grandfather, but which has been mine. It was my grandfather's secret. He built the passage."

"And now, beyond your room?"

"My chamber opens into a large square hall, upon which three other rooms open."

"Yes, and Thamen's apartments?"



"Directly opposite mine."

"Good," replied the detective quickly. Then, turning to Chick, he said:

"Chick, I am going to ask you to escort Dannenhauer and his bride back to the place where we landed, and get them aboard the *Ida* just as soon as you can."

"And you, Nick?"

"Only half of my job is done. I am going to get Prince Thamen!"

"Oh, say, Nick, this isn't a square deal," cried Chick.

"I see now what you have been driving at. You are going to put your head in the lion's mouth! But hanged if you are going to do it alone!"

A smile broke over the detective's face, and he placed his hand lovingly on the shoulder of his assistant.

"I know it's hard, Chick, my boy," he said gently, "but orders are orders, you know. We have agreed on that. One of us must hold himself safe in case anything happens to the other. We have got to get Thamen! If I fail, the task is yours."

Chick bowed his head. He knew it would be useless to argue further.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carter," said Dannenhauer earnestly. "I know that I am not entitled to interfere in your affairs, particularly after all you have done for Zora and me, but don't you think you will have accomplished as much as is necessary if you succeed in getting away safely now from this den of heathens?"

"You seem to forget, Dannenhauer, that I have accomplished nothing in my official capacity. Prince Thamen is an escaped prisoner from the United States where he is accused of murder. It is Thamen that I came after—incidentally to help you and your bride—it is Thamen I shall take back with me—if I go. And now it is time for you to start for the coast. Good-by, and good luck to you. I do not think you will have any trouble in making the yacht. Chick, you are in charge. You have my authority from now on to act according to your own judgment in getting Mr. and Mrs. Dannenhauer back to the *Ida*."

Then Nick held out his hand to Dannenhauer, who shook it warmly, and, as Nick was about to turn away, Zora laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Mr. Carter," she said softly, "I think I understand how you regard your duty, and I realize that it is useless to try to dissuade you from your course. But I want you to know how deeply I appreciate all that you have done for me. But for you I should still believe Franz was dead, and should have settled down here to take my place again in the horrible, superstition-stifled life of my people, which I have learned to loathe. I feel—I know—you will succeed, but I shall pray for you!"

She caught Nick's hand as she finished, pressed it to her lips, turned, and joined her husband.

A moment later Nick was standing alone facing the black hole in the side of the cliff!

It was certainly a hazardous undertaking—that of removing Thamen, single-handed from his own stronghold—but Nick Carter enjoyed desperate ventures.

For a time he stood mentally repeating what Dannenhauer and Zora had told him of the mysteries within the rock. Then he stepped into the darkness of the cliff passage, and a moment later the rock slid back into place!

## CHAPTER X.

## WITHIN THE IDOL.

"Now for the chamber of the idol," muttered Nick, as he worked the lever that closed the entrance below.

He made his way cautiously across the stockadelike space, and found the iron gate that led into the idol room was still open.

"The escape has not been discovered yet, at all events," he thought.

Entering the chamber, which was in total darkness, Nick stood for a moment, listening. There was no sound, and he flashed his electric pocket lamp.

The grinning idol loomed before him.

"Charming companion," grunted Nick; "but I think I can make some use of you, my friend."

He made a quick circle of the image, examining it by the aid of his flash light.

"Hollow, as I thought," muttered the detective, as he rapped on the wooden idol with his knuckles.

Returning to the rear of the image, he examined the age-stained wood with great care. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, and pressed his finger on what might approximate the position of the middle vertebrae of the idol.

There was a slight grinding sound—the long unused mechanism of the image's anatomy was complaining—and a section of the back of the image, about three feet high by two feet wide began to open outward.

"The old Aztec that first constructed this museum was full of cute ideas," chuckled Nick, stepping into the idol. "This is one trick that his present-day descendants have overlooked."

He flashed his light around him, and saw that there were three rough steps. The tread was very narrow, and the rise extremely high, so that the three steps, when Nick had climbed them, brought his head within the head of the idol.

"Just as I thought," muttered Nick. "This is where the high priest used to keep tab on his worshippers."

The blazing jewel that formed the left eye of the image was fitted neatly into a sliding frame that could be pushed to one side, so that the person in the head of the idol could use the opening for a peep hole.

Nick pushed the jewel aside and looked through. He was surprised at the width of view. By holding his flash close to the right eye a dim light was made to illuminate the chamber.

"Now, if I am not greatly mistaken, Prince Thamen will visit his prisoner here again to-night," mused the detective. "The question is will he come alone? I don't know just how many of these little men I can handle. They are a sort of unknown quantity. However, I can look the situation over from here."

He had scarcely finished his soliloquy when he heard what sounded like the click of a lock. A moment later he could hear some one moving about in the chamber. His eye was at the peephole, but the room was in darkness, and he could see no one.

Then he heard a voice. It was Thamen's. Nick chuckled as he heard his words.

"Dannenhauer," he said, almost in a whisper, "I am going to make a light. Remember that I am armed. I will shoot to kill if you make a move. I want to talk to you, and it will be for your good to listen."



A dim light then illuminated the chamber, and Nick could see that Thamen was huddled closely to the wall, holding in his hand a light that somewhat resembled a Chinese lantern, only that it was inclosed in a black cylinder, which could be dropped down to expose the light.

In his other hand Thamen held a revolver at arm's length.

Even in the imperfect light Nick could see the look of astonishment that followed Thamen's rapid survey of the apartment.

Slowly, with the revolver still thrust out before him, the puzzled man moved out from the wall, and began to make a cautious circuit of the room. Nick could see that he was alone.

Stepping quickly down and out of the image, the detective met Thamen as he was coming around the idol. And he met him effectively. Nick's right arm shot out, and his fist caught the man on the point of the chin. He went down like a log, the revolver was discharged in the air, and the lantern fell to the floor, leaving the chamber in total darkness.

Nick flashed his pocket lamp, and quickly snapped a pair of handcuffs on the unconscious man's wrists. Then he patiently waited for him to recover.

Presently his eyes opened and he looked into the face of the detective who was leaning over him.

"It would seem that you have won again, Mr. Carter," he said quietly.

He was game to the last.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The State against Prince Thamen and the Princess Tanza, so called, charged with the murder of Franz Dannenhauer!"

The announcement rang clearly through the crowded courtroom. Public interest in the case had been widely aroused by the crime, and the dramatic stories that had filled the columns of the yellow journals for weeks.

"Arraign the prisoners," quietly ordered the court, at the same time looking expectantly at the district attorney. That official, his face expressing worry and anxiety, sprang to his feet.

"May it please your honor, I move the trial of the Princess Tanza," he said.

"But I understand from the papers in the case that the man is the principal defendant. Isn't this an unusual reversal of procedure, Mr. District Attorney?"

"It is, your honor, but the circumstances are also unusual. I move the trial of the princess first, in order that I may ask an adjournment of the case. As your honor is undoubtedly aware, the principal is a fugitive from justice, and the principal witness is not here."

The district attorney paused as if waiting for some expression from the court.

The judge nodded in acquiescence.

"I am unofficially informed of that feature of the case," he said. "Have you any report to make as to the progress of the search for the escaped prisoner?"

"None, I regret to say, your honor."

"What has been done by the police?"

"The matter is not in the hands of the regular police department."

"And pray, Mr. District Attorney, to what department shall the court look for the return of the prisoner—that of parks and playgrounds?"

"No, sir," replied the district attorney, coloring. "The court, of course, knows only the police department in the matter, but, on my advice, Mr. Nicholas Carter, the detective, has been engaged on the case."

"But Nick Carter is not an officer of the court, nor an employee of any city department. We cannot hold him responsible."

"Quite true, your honor. I accept all responsibility. And, as Mr. Carter is the principal witness for the State, I ask for an adjournment of the case."

"What have you heard from the detective?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No, sir. Nick Carter seldom reports, except with results, and then usually in person. Again I ask your honor for an ad——"

"If it please your honor, the defendant is here!"

A clear voice rang through the courtroom, and all eyes were turned to the door.

Nick Carter, with the right hand of Thamen manacled to his left was standing in the doorway!

THE END.

"Through Dark Ways; or, Nick Carter's Struggle With a Wicked Woman," the story that will be found in the next issue of this weekly, No. 57, out October 11th, tells more of Nick Carter's crime-solving methods and experiences in bringing to justice the aristocratic criminals from this mysterious Central American country. It is a sequel of the Nick Carter stories that appeared in two preceding numbers of this weekly.

## FOUND GUILTY;

Or, Steve Manley Against Court and Jury.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

### CHAPTER I.

STEVE MANLEY DOES HIS DUTY.

"Good gracious, Joe! Look there!"

"Look where, Steve?"

"In front of Waldon's house. Look at the crowd."

"Something has happened."

"The ambulance is there. Look—there comes Chief O'Mara, of the detectives!" cried Manley excitedly. "A crime has been committed."

"Let's learn what it all means, Steve."

"That's just what I intend to do!"

And Steve Manley quickly remounted his bicycle and wheeled down the street, closely followed by his companion.

It was about six o'clock on a fine May morning, and these were two bright Pennville boys out for an early spin.

Steve Manley was an orphan. He had lost both of his parents in the great Galveston flood. Though a small lad at that time, he was a manly and self-reliant boy, and at once had resolved to make a mark of his own in the world. He now was fifteen, and for one year had been a clerk in the great glass house of Hall, Spooner & Co.

Like many a youth of his years, he had found much